

**Public Comments by Dr. Diane DeBacker
Interim Commissioner of Education
Kansas Board of Regents
State University Admissions Task Force
August 25, 2010**

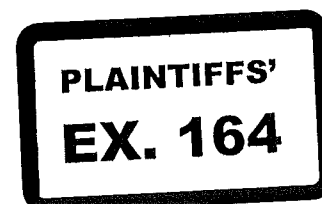
Distinguished Members of the State University Admissions Task Force:

On behalf of the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE), thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback with regard to the proposed changes to the Qualified Admissions requirements for Kansas Board of Regents' public universities. The Kansas State Department of Education appreciates the efforts by the Kansas Board of Regents to establish admission requirements designed to provide students with the greatest opportunity for success upon entering college or other post-secondary opportunities. While there is much to applaud in these recommendations, there are a few areas of concern that I would like to address on behalf of KSDE and Kansas K-12 public education.

The first is in regard to the requirement to complete a 17-unit precollege curriculum. Please note that KSDE certainly supports the efforts of the Kansas Board of Regents to ensure a rigorous course of study for high school students that will improve their chances for success at the post-secondary level. However, we are troubled by the fact that the requirements for those 17 units do not recognize the contributions of Career and Technical Education courses. The State Board of Education has for the past two years been working on initiatives and priorities to ensure that opportunities for Career and Technical Education are available to all Kansas students and that the value and potential of these courses are fully recognized by our schools. As our state moves to Career Clusters and Career Pathways at the secondary level, the courses required to complete these are, indeed, rigorous and can lead to industry certifications and postsecondary degrees. We see tremendous correlation between academic coursework and Career and Technical Education opportunities and would like for that to be recognized in the Qualified Admissions requirements.

A second area of concern for KSDE has to do with the requirement for four years of math, with one year to have been completed during the student's senior year in high school. KSDE fully realizes the benefits to students who take a fourth year of math; however, we are concerned about the impact to staffing levels that this requirement creates for our schools. Since the draft Qualified Admissions requirements were released in March of this year, we've heard from numerous schools that this requirement will create significant increased staffing needs. While budgetary constraints should not be the primary reason for not implementing this requirement, we urge the Task Force to carefully listen to the speakers you'll hear throughout the day and understand that districts are already being forced to reduce staff due to budget cuts. Certainly, the benefit of our students must be our first priority. However, given the current struggles our schools face with regard to funding, we question the timing of this increased requirement.

Our third area of concern is the requirement for a half unit of civics in the social sciences curriculum. We have no quarrel with the importance of civics education, but we also recognize the whole host of valuable social science disciplines that are available to students. KSDE fails to see how the civics requirement prepares students for college coursework any more so than



other social science areas. KSDE would be in favor of leaving the half unit of social science credit open, as it is in the current Qualified Admissions requirements.

I would be remiss if I failed to mention the impending changes facing K-12 education in Kansas and across the United States. Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is scheduled to take place in the spring of 2011. Reauthorization of ESEA will bring with it many changes to K-12 public education. Specifically, we expect new standards in English Language Arts and Math. Reauthorization will also result in new assessments in these two content areas. Last year, 48 states agreed to review their standards and committed to the development of Common Core Standards in these two areas. The Common Core Standards effort was lead by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors' Association (NGA). The result? A common set of standards in English Language Arts and Math that are internationally benchmarked, higher, and clearer than most states' current standards. Individual states will determine if the Common Core Standards will replace their current state standards. To date, 38 states have adopted the Common Core Standards. In Kansas, the Kansas State Board of Education is charged with adopting standards. KSDE staff and content experts from across the state were actively involved in the development of the Common Core Standards and have kept the State Board informed of the Standards over the past year. We anticipate action from our State Board in October of this year. While I cannot predict the outcome of the vote for Common Core Standards, I can assure you that KSDE staff and the content experts we rely on for advice and guidance agree that these standards are, indeed, higher and clearer than our current standards. KSDE staff will recommend the State Board adopt the Common Core Standards.

New standards will bring new assessments. Kansas has joined with 31 other states to form the SMARTER/Balanced Consortium to develop what we term as the "new or next" generation of assessments that will include both adaptive and performance based components. For those of you familiar with our current assessments, this is quite a change and certainly a tremendous advancement. Membership in the SMARTER/Balanced Consortium required that states work with their higher education system to agree that once the cut score was set for the assessments, students attaining this score would be granted automatic entry into credit-bearing postsecondary courses. This is monumental. And, this is how much confidence we have in the Common Core Standards and the yet-to-be-developed Common Assessments. Given this, it seems premature to make any major changes in the Qualified Admissions requirements—especially in the area of math.

I also must mention the important and groundbreaking work that has taken place with the P-20 Council. As you know, the P-20 Council was formed by an Executive Order of Governor Sebelius in 2008. As stated in the Executive Order, the P-20 Council: 1) shall establish a vision statement, mission statement and guiding principles that reflect the needs of the education system; 2) create a shared plan for reaching the state's vision of a comprehensive system of education and shall establish benchmarks to promote the Council's commitment to success; and 3) focus on standards-based improvement in P-20 policy and program coherence and coordination among the state department of education, school districts, postsecondary institutions, state department of commerce, businesses, communities and foundations. Our work over the past two years has resulted in an on-going gap analysis of what high school graduates know and can do to what entry-level college professors believe is necessary for success in college. The gap analysis work has been spearheaded by Dr. Gary Alexander of the Kansas Board of Regents and myself. What we've found through our work and the work of the two separate gap analysis groups is that there is more of a perceived gap than an actual gap.

At our most recent meeting to review the Common Core Standards, the postsecondary representatives for the English Language Arts group indicated that if students could do what was written in the Standards, they (postsecondary) would have to change what they are doing at the collegiate level. This is a profound statement and, again, shows the significant changes the Common Core Standards and will bring to K-12 education.

In closing, I want to reiterate our support for admission standards that are not only fair to students and schools but also offer the best opportunities for students to be successful in their academic pursuits beyond high school. KSDE appreciates the work of the Qualified Admissions Task Force and the Kansas Board of Regents in developing these recommendations. I encourage the Kansas Board of Regents to work collaboratively with KSDE in designing and implementing a Qualified Admissions process that recognizes the changes taking place in K-12 public education, a variety of disciplines and the many talents and skills of our Kansas students. The changes that are before the education world in the next few years will provide opportunities never seen before. We must seize these opportunities and chart a new course for the future of Kansas.

Once again, thank you for your work for the students of Kansas and for allowing KSDE and the many others that will come before you today the opportunity to provide input.

Sincerely,

Dr. Diane M. DeBacker, Interim
Commissioner of Education